

A Compassionate Authority

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Preacher: Rev. Aaron Roberts

[0 : 00] Well, folks, good morning. Good morning. If you've just started attending St. John's, which I know some of you will be, just, you know, beginning of the year, or the academic year anyway, you couldn't have joined at a better time.

We've just begun the Gospel of Mark, and this is our second week in it. And you've heard the readings, and you'll see here that there's basically kind of four short episodes, and on the surface they may look unconnected, but they are actually very connected.

Let me tell you, let me give you the overview first, okay? One, what are these things doing here? One, they are examples of what it looks like when the kingdom of God comes near.

You remember that these episodes occur immediately after Christ has said, the kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe. Kingdom of God is here.

It's come close to us. Here's what it looks like. Two, they point to the future kingdom. And so what happens for these people now and temporarily, and happens to a few people, will happen to all Christians eventually when Christ returns.

[1 : 18] Three, they help to establish the identity of Christ. If you're at the Mark teaching day yesterday, David, I assume, talked about one of the structural elements, which was the first eight chapters are about the identity of Christ, and it's kind of this unfolding.

And so what happens here as we're reading these stories, you see, well, whoever this guy is, we know a few things about him. One, he's a man of authority, incredible authority. But he's also incredibly compassionate.

Lastly, these four episodes, they set up a major, major twist. They set up a dramatic turn. So, firstly, examples of what it looks like when the kingdom of God comes near.

Two, signposts pointing to the future kingdom, which we'll all experience. Three, the identity of Christ, the compassionate authority. And four, they set up a major twist.

Folks, let's get into Mark. It is all about the action, so let's get right into it. Let's start at verses 16 to 20. That's the first little episode. This is the calling of the disciples.

[2 : 34] So Jesus is walking along a beach, and he calls four men into ministry with him. And there's so many cool things I want to say about this, but I really need to limit myself. And I'll touch on a few, and then I'll pull out what I think are the big ideas.

Okay, here's just a few things which I think are really cool. One, is Ruth Matheson here? I don't know if she is. Ruth Matheson is kind of the unofficial historian of St. John's.

And Ruth, if she was writing the story of St. John's, the history of St. John's, this is actually where you should start, because this is the beginning of the church right here. This is Jesus calling the first folks together.

This is the common history of all churches. So it's a very significant moment here. The second thing I think is really cool about this is, do you notice that Christ says, follow me?

Follow me. He doesn't say follow an idea, follow an ideology, follow a philosophy, follow a set of rules, follow some guidelines. It's follow me.

[3 : 37] It's follow a person. And I just want you to remember that. Folks, you are following the person of Jesus Christ. The third thing here, I think, is that, do you notice, do you see the cost?

These men walked away from things, didn't they? Nets, careers, family member. And you know this though, right, I think. There is a cost to following Jesus.

And those are all important ideas out of this first story here. But the things that really jump out at me, the things that really leap off the page is this. Firstly, the fact that he just did it at all.

That he actually just called some people. I mean, he invited people into his family to do ministry with him. And we don't know why he chose these people over others.

It was just, it was grace and it was mercy, right? Like, why these folks? They didn't do our tittle. You know? It doesn't say there are particularly handsome people or like real movers and shakers in Galilee.

[4 : 46] They're just sort of four men he just chose. You're going to do the work of the kingdom with me. That's awesome. Everyone here today, you were here because God chose you.

And you should be profoundly grateful for that. The other thing that jumps out at me here is the authority of Christ. Jesus spoke and they obeyed.

He just spoke a sentence. And they dropped everything and followed him. Now you might think you're a big player around town. I do in my house.

You know, in my house, I'm right up there. You know? Just, just slowly, obviously, Amy's right up there. And I'm sort of right. So I'm more middle management, to be honest.

But, but I'm still in charge of my daughter. I can't even get her to finish her Rice Krispies in the morning. You know? Even when I use my angry voice. My special naughty girl voice.

[5 : 46] You know? I don't carry that kind of authority. But Jesus, he just said these words. This sort of gruff command almost. And they obeyed. You know, I've read in some commentaries, they describe it as the most beautiful invitation ever.

But they're wrong. I mean, it's beautiful. But it's not an invitation. If it was an invitation, if Jesus was, if this was an invitation, Jesus would make out little save the date cards.

And hand them out to people. Hey, I'm having a change the world party. You know? You should come along. You'd all be killed. But, you know, it's got to be great.

I wish you could make it. Why don't you think about it? No. It's a command. It's a royal command. It's coming from the mouth of a king.

And so, of course, they obey. Because Christ's word have authority. And do you see here at the second part of it? I will make you fishers of men. Again, this is described wrongly by people.

[6 : 48] It's described as a commissioning. It's not a commissioning. It's a promise. I will make you. I will make you fishers of men. I will do a work in your heart that nothing else could ever do in your world.

This thing that I'm doing, it's miraculous. It's beautiful. It's wonderful. I'm going to completely change your agendas. And I'm going to do this thing. And it happens very slowly.

But it happens, well, because it's a king speaking, right? And he has that kind of authority. Do you see the compassionate authority of Jesus here?

He loved these guys so much. He chose them just out of nowhere and made them the founders of his church. And do you see the kingdom here?

Do you see what happens when the kingdom comes near? Lives are redirected for kingdom purposes. That's the first episode.

[7 : 48] The second episode is Jesus heals a man with an unclean spirit. So Jesus is in Capernaum, and he's preaching in a synagogue. And so a synagogue is not a temple, right?

A temple, that's like the big cathedral. The synagogues are kind of like smaller deals where there's no animal sacrifices there. And people would gather there.

Somebody would teach from the Torah, and preach a sermon, right? They'd expound on a sermon. Guys would be quite good at it, and they'd be called scribes. So Jesus is at this synagogue, and there's a demoniac.

This guy starts flipping out. And what are you going to do with us, Jesus? Have you come to destroy us? Yes, basically. I know who you are. I mean, it's an amazing scene here.

I don't know if you've been in a church where something like this has happened. I have. It's kind of the strangest thing, you know? I remember being in a church back in New Zealand. A guy bursts through the back doors and says loudly, I am Jesus.

[8 : 50] And somebody said, no, you're not. And it's probably a reasonable response. And it all kind of went sideways, to be honest, after that. But it was, you know, it was, I mean, stuff like this happens, right?

I mean, this man, that's not a fair example because this guy was clearly mentally ill. And this is a real example of someone who's, you know, possessed by the enemy. But this stuff does happen in churches. And what is it that gets this guy started?

It's the preaching of Jesus, isn't it? Folks, you sit under preaching regularly, God will cause your evil to bubble up. Have you experienced that?

Listening to a sermon, and your heart fights against it? The enemy hates preaching. Enemy, you know, hates the truth. Anyway, back to the story. So the sky starts flipping out. It would have been a crazy situation. And what does Jesus do? How does he respond? Well, verse 25 says that Jesus spoke to him and said, be silent and come out of him. [9 : 52] And of course, the demons obey. Now, this is not Jesus sort of showing he's kind of got the goods. Look at me. I can do cool stuff, right? This, again, is about the compassionate authority of Jesus.

The authority part is shown in the fact that even something that hates Jesus has to obey him. We also see the authority coming out, this idea of this man of authority coming out in the response of the onlookers, right?

What is it that they notice about Jesus afterwards? Their summation. They're not going, hey, great sermon. He's got such fresh and quirky ideas or really good examples.

No, they say here it's his authority, right? Verse 22. What is this? A new teaching with authority. And of course, we see the compassion of Jesus in this passage because this man had this dark thing inside of him and he was released from it.

And his life would have been changed as a result. Folks, when the kingdom of God comes near, when the compassionate rule of God is brought to bear on a situation, what happens?

[11 : 04] Restoration happens. Restoration through the banishment of evil. So there is this idea of lives being redirected and this idea of the banishment of evil.

That's what we've learned so far. Now, the scene ends, verse 28. And at once has fame spread everywhere throughout the surrounding region in Galilee. That's going to be really important later, okay?

So just bear that in mind. All right, the next scene. After the synagogue, Jesus goes back to Simon's house. And Simon's mother-in-law is sick.

And Jesus heals her. It's a really kind of humble, beautiful little kind of miracle, I think. It's a really light.

Did you see here that she just serves them at the end? That's her first response? And of course, that's the right response, isn't it, to a life being touched by Jesus? It's service.

[12 : 06] Serving God's family. I mean, it's this beautiful little picture of what it means to follow Jesus. And just the authority of Jesus as well.

I mean, he doesn't even say anything. He just sort of takes a hand. Just lifts her up. Helps her out of bed. It's beautiful. Spine tingling, you know. And like the previous story, it's a picture of the future restoration, the future healing that we will all experience as the people of God when Christ returns. So again, what have we learned? The sign that the kingdom is coming near, people are given new agendas. Evil is banished.

People's lives are redirected towards service. And there is healing. And it all happens because of the authority of Jesus.

Now you might be thinking, I really like that last little story. That's my favorite part. Jesus is doing something really practical here. Something actually helpful.

[13 : 19] I wish Jesus did more of that kind of thing. He should stay and heal everybody. That would be cool. If you're thinking that, you're thinking what everybody was thinking.

You're thinking what the crowd was thinking. You're thinking what the disciples were thinking. Everyone was thinking that. Everybody except Jesus. And this is where the story takes a fairly dramatic turn.

Here's the twist, folks. Verses 32 to 34. As we'd already said, his fame is spread, right?

So all these people started turning up at the house. And of course it makes perfect sense, doesn't it? I mean, you'd be there. I'd be there. I'd be there with my kids.

I'd ring up my mates who are really sick. You've got to come along. There's a miracle worker in town. He'll pray for you. It'll all be sorted. Don't worry about it. And the story of Simon's mum just shows how wonderful it is.

[14 : 27] But the twist is this. Jesus takes off. He leaves. Verse 35 to 39. Jesus gets up really early in the morning to pray to the Father.

This is significant, you know, because Jesus only prays, I think, three times. Outside of blessing meals, he prays three times in Mark. And it's always, like, difficult things that he's going through.

The most famous example that bookends this one is, of course, Jesus praying in the garden before he's about to get arrested and crucified. And why does Jesus go in the garden to pray?

Because he's being tempted. Jesus is being tempted there. He's being tempted to walk away from what God has for him. This is, you know, the prayer, he says, Father, remove this cup from me. But your will, not mine. And Jesus has another temptation here. The temptation is to stay and replicate what he did for Peter's mother-in-law for everybody.

[15:32] And as good as that sounds, as cool as that would be for them, then it would be temporary, wouldn't it?

Because they'd still die. It would be a band-aid over a much greater problem facing humanity. Now, this doesn't take away from the fact that these are signs of the kingdom, right?

They exist eternally as that. But they're setting up the twist, and the twist is this, is that Jesus leaves them. Jesus leaves a whole lot of sick people.

And there's a lot of drama in here, right? People turn up. Jesus is gone. He's off praying. Simon wakes up in the morning. You know, there's a million people outside. So they go to wake up Jesus to get him out there and do his thing, right?

And he's not there, and they freak out. Doesn't he understand? Like, everyone in Galilee who's sick is here. We could get a, we've got a good thing going here.

[16:39] We've got a ministry, man. Let's, you know, let's let, this is awesome. Why would Jesus bail out now? It says in verse 36 that they searched him out.

They tried to find Jesus, because he's ruining everything. That phrase, searched him out, is in Mark a number of times, and it's always negative. Famously used for the people searching for Jesus to kill him.

That's a little cue for us. So eventually they find, they find Jesus and they say this. Simon says this, everyone is looking for you. It's a rebuke. You're blowing it, Jesus.

You're blowing it. People could really use your help. Jesus has prayed to the Father, and he has steeled his focus in verse 38.

He says, let's go to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out. That's the shock. He leaves these people to preach the gospel.

[17:42] Why? Because they knew in their hearts that these people weren't looking for Jesus the Savior. They just wanted the miracle guy to sort out their immediate problems, which is kind of understandable.

But what Jesus had on offer here was so much more wonderful and so much more important and so much more remarkable because it was eternal.

But they didn't see it. And this is going to be a continuous theme in Mark. People are generally clueless as to why Jesus came. So Jesus prays to the Father, discerns their heart, decides, decides, no, I've got to go to the next town and preach, repent, and believe.

See, Christ, his mission was to show people the shape and the nature of the kingdom of God.

Right? We've talked about that. To show the shape and the nature of the kingdom of God through these compassionate signs and miracles.

But not just show them. He wanted to ask for a response. He wanted to invite them in to the kingdom through repentance.

[18:53] That's why that phrase, the kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe, are together. They're not two separate ideas he's throwing out there. The kingdom of God is at hand. Get in.

And here's how you do it. Repentance. Belief. Folks, that's the basic overview of the passage there. And what's it got to do with us?

If you are here and you are not a Christian, I'm delighted you're here. Really, you couldn't be here at a better time. Beginning of the gospel. Beginning of the story of Jesus.

Right? But can I just say to you, do not make the same mistake that the crowds made. Do not misunderstand who Jesus is and why he came for you.

You know, people come to Jesus all the time thinking he's something he's not. You know, like he's a dialogue partner for my, you know, philosophies.

[19:58] Or he's a great moral example. Or he's my higher, this higher being that I turn to when life just goes all horrible for me every now and then.

He can't just be those things. No, you'll learn as we go through the gospel, this is the son of God who loves you so dearly and wants to rescue you and wants to restore you.

The best way, you know, you can learn more about this is we have a short course called The Life of Jesus. It starts next week.

It's on the identity and mission of Jesus. And you know, it's especially for interested skeptics who want some space to learn about Jesus and some time to ask questions.

You can learn more about that in the white sheet called the PLN, Life of Jesus. There'll be a table after the service out the back. Somebody will be, a nice man called Jim is going to be sitting there. You can ask him questions about it.

[21 : 01] Okay, what about the Christians here? What do you get out of this? Let me ask you a question. I've said that the crowd in the passage were more interested in their immediate temporary needs, understandably, you know.

when what Jesus had on offer was so much more wonderful and eternal.

So my question is this. Does the eternal take priority in your life? Our culture wants to flatten our perspective.

It wants us to live quite horizontally. What I mean by that is that most of our brain and heart space taken up by our immediate needs.

You know, we want a good retirement and we want, if we have kids, we want them to go to good schools and want them to be nice and we want to have a good job and that's all great stuff, right?

[22 : 12] Don't, I'm not saying that's bad, that's wonderful, wonderful stuff. But you don't just have this horizontal aspect to your life, you have this vertical aspect, right?

Which is your relationship with God and your commitment to His mission in the world. And sometimes our hearts are so taken up by this stuff here that this kind of gets a bit squeezed out, I think.

Can I remind you, just respectfully remind you, this is temporary and this is eternal and this is not a dichotomy, okay? They do actually meet and so you can think about your retirement, you can think about your kids and you can think about your jobs in terms of how these things give glory to God. And so all I'm saying to you is that your priority should be God's mission in the world and your relationship with Him.

So don't make the mistakes of this crowd who came to Jesus interested in the temporary. The kingdom of God is at hand.

[23 : 31] Repent and believe. Amen. Amen.